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ABSTRACT

Issue advertising is intended to inform an audience--most commonly with the intent of changing unfavorable opinions or reinforcing favorable ones--to affect cognition (in contrast to the behavioral emphasis of product and service advertising, intended to stimulate trail and adoption). To explore public reactions to printed and televised issues advertising, a study looked into reactions of university students to the current campaign sponsored by the United States Committee for Energy Awareness (USCEA). Seventy-four female and 42 male students, divided into four groups, were exposed to a magazine advertisement and three 30-second television advertisements on issues related to energy. One group served as control, one read the printed ad, one saw the videotapes, and one both viewed the tape and read the ad. All then responded to a questionnaire indicating their support/opposition to nuclear energy. Analysis of their answers suggests that, in some regards, issues advertisements influence opponents of public policy more than they influence supporters. Supporters of nuclear energy simply continued their beliefs and arguments for it, while opponents generated an increased number of arguments against nuclear energy (not by refuting the advertisements' claims, but by stressing other issues). These effects were most pronounced among those who saw the videos, which suggests that issue advertisement effects may vary both across and within forms of media. (Twenty-six references and a table of results are appended.) (SKC)

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TOWARD AN INFORMATION INTEGRATION APPROACH TO ISSUE ADVERTISING

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TOWARD AN INFORMATION INTEGRATION APPROACH TO ISSUE ADVERTISING

Abstract

This study assesses reactions to print and televised versions of issue advertising sponsored by the pro-nuclear U. S. Committee for Energy Awareness (USCEA). Analysis of the campaign includes an overview of the obstacles that must be met by those who undertake issue advertising in the face of deep-seated resistance. Findings indicate: (1) Issue advertisements influence opponents of public policy proposals more than supporters. This influence was measured in the relative number of arguments respondents used to bolster their opinions on public policy issues related to the ads. Despite the abundance of ad content favoring the sponsor's position, opponents articulated more arguments than did supporters. (2) Copy points in print ads were utilized by supporters in explaining why they endorsed the sponsoring organization's position. In contrast, television failed to deliver similar results and may create a backlash effect by stimulating greater resistance to such advertised messages.

TOWARD AN INFORMATION INTEGRATION APPROACH TO ISSUE ADVERTISING

In the past two decades, issues advertising has become a vital corporate communication response to sharp and sometimes ill-informed criticism from media and special-interest groups. Although such advertising has been less extensively researched than product and service advertising, recent studies have examined the regulation of issues/public policy advertising (22, 11) and its role in corporate strategic planning (2, 4, 12). Other research has used field surveys to determine the degree of acceptance of issues management by companies (3), the effects of specific campaigns (1, 26), and public reactions to corporations' use of issues advertising (7). To date, however, no comprehensive study, either theoretical or empirical, has discussed the cognitive effects or processing strategies typical of audience reaction to issues advertisements.

The most fundamental requirement of issues advertising is to inform an audience, most commonly with the intent of changing unfavorable opinions or reinforcing favorable ones. Although issues ads may encourage grassroots participation, in most campaigns the primary objective is to affect cognition. In contrast, the emphasis of product and service advertising is behavioral -- to stimulate trial and adoption (10, 18). To achieve these objectives, product/service advertising is sometimes primarily informative, although this is likely to be the case only in regard to significant purchases such as life insurance, automobile, or camera. Advertisements for more routine purchases (e.g., cleansers, perfumes, or greeting cards) typically contain

few informational copy points (16, 25). Indeed, consumers consider product and service ads generally uninformative (5, 15, 17) and expect televised ads, in particular, to contain low levels of information (20, 19, 24). Thus, issues advertising and product/service advertising often have dissimilar objectives and, so, place dissimilar emphasis upon information provision.

Likewise, audiences verify the content of issue and product/service advertisements differently. Not only does product/service advertising attempt to induce trial (of the product/service), but such trial also provides a consumer valuable information concerning its quality (23, 9). That is, consumers can test the facticity of an ad claim by using the product or service. This is true also in business-to-business advertising. In public policy situations, however, direct verification of advertising content ordinarily is impossible. Instead, information acquired from issues advertisements is tested indirectly by comparing it against prior opinions and information acquired from other sources (e.g., news sources and conversation). Thus, the targeted outcomes of issues advertising are primarily cognitive: reception, recall of information, attitude change (including reinforcement), information integration, and subsequent use of the information.

Previous research suggests that information gained from issues advertisements influences public attitudes. Douglas, Westley, and Chaffee (6), for example, tracked a campaign concerning mental retardation and observed that acquisition of information from ad content was positively associated with attitude toward the mentally handicapped. These authors speculate that the success of this campaign resulted partially because the

public did not have deep-seated, negative attitudes against the mentally retarded. Similarly, Heath and Douglas (13) have reported that issue ads in a nuclear energy campaign influenced public opinion, even on correlary issues not referenced in the ad but which were relevant to the issue topic. Significantly, Heath and Douglas also observed that recall of printed ad content was impeded by exposure to television versions of the ad, suggesting that the effects of issues advertisements may be contingent upon media employed during the campaign. It is likely, too, that information reception and attitude change are a function of the perceived importance or relevance of an issue and may be most pronounced when persons have little prior knowledge of an issue (14).

Although informative, previous analyses of issues advertisements have not examined the extent to which persons integrate ad content into subsequent argument. That is, there is no present understanding of (1) the extent to which supporters of a campaign use issue ad content to bolster their position or (2) the strategies that opponents of a campaign use to refute issue ad content. This is an important research area since persons' willingness and ability to use ad content in subsequent conversation is likely to determine the extent and longevity of a campaign's effectiveness. Moreover, analysis of opponents' reaction to advertisements may provide insight into limitations inherent in issue campaigns.

This paper explored persons' reactions to printed and televised issues advertising. The ads used in the study were selected from the current campaign sponsored by the U. S.

Committee for Energy Awareness (USCEA) and conducted by Ogilvy & Mather. Such ads were considered appropriate because they deal with an issue toward which there is deeply felt resistance (i.e., there are a sufficient number of opponents to allow analysis). Moreover, as in most issues advertising, the content of the experimental ads was difficult to verify directly. For example, individuals cannot directly confirm that nuclear fuel frees the US from foreign oil sources, is used and stored safely, or will reduce the cost of electricity to industrial and domestic users. Finally, the campaign's target population corresponds closely to that found on a university campus, adding to the ecological validity of the study. The target audience is persons 25 to 64 years of age with college degrees and includes information seekers and opinion leaders. This audience profile is typical of influentials on energy public policy issues (8).

Methodology

Subjects

Participants were 74 female and 42 male undergraduate students enrolled in basic communication courses at the University of Houston--University Park. Subjects ranged in age from 18 to 48 (mean age = 23.5) and were offered extra credit for participating in the research.

Stimulus materials

The stimuli for the study consisted of one two-page magazine advertisement entitled "Energy Independence" and three 30-second advertisements, "Falling," "Growing," and "Gears." "Energy Independence" affirmatively answers the question, "Can home grown energy free us from foreign independence?" It provides text and

graphic materials to inform readers on subtopics such as the United States' rank among all major oil producing nations, the projected percentages of energy sources which will be used to generate electricity in the year 1990, US nuclear and coal reserves, and the projected cost of oil should the Persian Gulf would be closed. One TV spot, "Falling," dramatizes the fall that could result if the US is too dependent on foreign energy sources; coal and nuclear energy, it proclaims, can rescue us from the fall. "Growing" stresses the need for reliable energy sources; homegrown coal and nuclear fuel. "Gears" underscores the need for coal and nuclear fuel to help industry have enough electricity; it also compliments industry's efforts to become increasingly energy efficient. The theme of these ads is that coal and nuclear fuel are essential to meet electricity demand which will continue to increase.

The TV ads were targeted to be viewed by 150 million people in 1985; each was presented at least five times. The magazine ads, which include the stimulus ad, were targeted to reach 130 million readers; each ad was placed eight times.

Procedures

The subjects were randomly assigned to one of four conditions; a group that neither viewed the videotape nor read the ad (i.e., a control group), a group that did not view the videotape but read the printed version of the ad (i.e., a read only group), a group that viewed the videotape but did not read the ads (i.e., a view only group), and a group that both viewed the videotape and read the ad (i.e., a view and read group). That

is, two levels of "video" (viewed/did not view) were crossed with two levels of "print" (read/did not read).

Persons in the control condition were required only to respond to a questionnaire in which they indicated (1) their support/opposition to the development of nuclear energy and (2) reasons for that support/opposition. Those in the "read only" condition were provided a copy of the printed ad described above and allowed as much time as they wished to read the ad. When they had completed this task, the ad was collected and they were given a copy of the questionnaire. Similarly, subjects in the "view only" condition completed the questionnaire after they had viewed the sequence of videotaped ads. Finally, subjects in the "view and read" group first watched the videotape. They were then given the printed version of the ad and, like their counterparts in the "read only" condition, allowed as much time as they wished to read the ad. The ad was collected from them when they had finished and they, too, responded to the questionnaire.

Results

Coding of arguments

Two judges read each of the protocols and independently identified and listed all arguments used by each subject. Interjudge agreement on this task was .98. The judges met to resolve cases of disagreement. Subsequent to defining all arguments, the same judges were required to sort them into categories: safety, conservation, nationalism, independence, and economics. Judges were told to keep separate any argument that did not appear to fit any of these groupings. Both judges sorted all arguments into one of the available categories and interjudge

agreement on the task was absolute. Subsequent to coding, the total number of arguments listed by each subject was computed together with parallel scores for each of the five argument categories.

Total arguments

The total number of arguments referenced by each subject was entered as the dependent variable in a Completely Randomized ANOVA in which the independent variables were "Video" (view/no view), "Print" (read/no read), and "Opinion" (support/oppose). This analysis demonstrated the total number of arguments included by subjects was systematically influenced by (1) the first-order interaction between "Paper" and "Opinion" ($F(1,108)=2.76$, $p<.05$) and (2) the first-order interaction between "Video" and "Opinion" ($F(1,108)=2.69$, $p<.05$). Subsequent application of separate Newman-Keuls multiple comparison tests showed that (1) opponents who did not read the printed version of the advertisement used fewer arguments than both opponents who did read that advertisement and supporters of the development of nuclear energy and (2) opponents who did not see the video version of the advertisement used fewer arguments than both opponents who did view that advertisement and supporters of the development of nuclear energy. That is, neither of the advertisements influenced the overall number of arguments listed by supporters. However, both versions of the advertisement induced opponents to generate more arguments than opponents not exposed to the ads.

Insert Table 1 about here

Argument categories

The total number of arguments listed by each subject in each of the five major categories were entered as the dependent variables in a Completely Randomized MANOVA in which the independent variables were again "Video," "Print," and "Opinion."

Examination of the multivariate effect tests in this analysis revealed significant differences due to (1) the "Video" by "Opinion" interaction (Pillais $F(5,104)=2.79$, $p<.025$) and (2) "Opinion" (Pillais $F(5,104)=25.21$, $p<.001$). No other effects were significant.

Further inspection of the relevant univariate tests together with tests of simple main effects showed that (1) supporters of nuclear development listed more arguments associated with conservation, independence, and economics than did opponents, (2) opponents who saw the video versions of the advertisement listed more safety related arguments than either opponents who did not watch the video advertisements or supporters, and (3) opponents who read the print version of the advertisement tended to list more safety related arguments than either opponents who did not read the advertisement or supporters.

Discussion

This analysis suggests that, in some regards, issues advertisements influence opponents of public policy more than supporters. Subjects in this study who indicated support of nuclear development were unaffected by the stimulus materials. Whether presented alone or in combination, the ads influenced neither the number nor the type of arguments that supporters used to justify their posi[illegible]n. That is, the ad content appeared to

reinforce arguments that supporters had developed previously. In contrast, exposure to either form of the advertisement induced opponents of nuclear energy to generate an increased number of arguments. Notably, however, opponents did not refute the ad claims directly. That is, they did not challenge the cost effectiveness of nuclear energy, its usefulness in conserving other energy resources, nor its potential to make the United States energy independent. Instead, they elaborated the issue of safety, an issue not referenced in either version of the advertisement. These effects were more pronounced in the "video" condition than among readers, suggesting that the relatively higher levels of information characteristic of print ads makes dismissal of ad content somewhat more difficult. Despite this muting influence, however, opponents of nuclear development consistently engaged a strategy of avoidance when responding to the advertisements, a strategy that involved more detailed articulation of a secondary issue.

These results are especially interesting when coupled with those of Heath and Douglas (13). Using the same stimulus materials, these researchers demonstrated that (1) the printed version of the advertisement contained information of which persons were previously unaware, (2) exposure to the video version of the advertisement inhibited recall of the printed material, and (3) exposure to the printed copy changed attitudes, even on issues not directly referenced (safety and the legitimacy of such advertising).

Together with those of the present study, such results suggest the effects of issue advertising may vary both across and

within forms of media. While the effects of the printed advertisement were primarily positive, those associated with exposure to the videotaped version were consistently negative. Such exposure reduced recall of printed material and prompted opponents to generate comparatively more arguments against the development of nuclear energy. In contrast, persons who read the printed advertisement exhibited higher recall of information supportive of nuclear development and held more positive attitudes toward nuclear development than did non-readers. However, at the level of information integration (into argument), the print ad, too, produced negative consequences.

Furthermore, whereas previous studies have dealt with issues that generated low levels of resistance, analysis of the USCEA campaign helps us understand the obstacles that must be met by those who undertake issues advertising in the face of deep-seated resistance. For example, even though opponents of nuclear energy apparently conceded the ad claims, they were capable of actively countering the policy positions advocated, indicating they have developed arguments that can be used in conversation to propogate their resistance. One might suppose that, in more ambiguous cases (i.e., when arguments are less well defined), opponents of a campaign are likely to attempt more direct refutation of ad content.

Conclusion

Clearly, the immediate generalizability of this research is limited and must be tested in the context of other campaigns. For instance, although discussion of related issues was not sufficiently compelling to allay opposition to nuclear

development, we do not know whether ad content addressing the issue of safety more directly would mitigate resistance.

Moreover, although examination of the USCEA campaign suggests that the effects of issue advertising are contingent upon both audience (e.g., support/opposition of associated supraordinate issues) and contextual (e.g., media used in a campaign) variables, subsequent analyses should seek to specify not only the direct influence of those variables but also their effect in combination. Such an approach to advertising research is consistent with that advocated by Schmalensee (21) and is one in which advertising is examined within a more wholistic framework.

Finally, it is important to understand how people see themselves as decision-makers. Persons develop many arguments and are capable of deciding which are most useful or appropriate within a particular context. Since the ads used in this study addressed issues of immediate national economic security and these were not compelling to opponents, the variables which govern such decisions do not appear to be merely immediacy or self-interest. It is probable that the decision matrix also includes more global traits individuals attribute to themselves as decision makers so that researchers may find that how persons view themselves is crucial to the ways they react to public policy issues.

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Table 1

Arguments by category: Cell means

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	TOTAL
Supporters						
No view/no read	.16	.16	.42	.26	.21	1.21
View only	.17	.06	.78	.11	.44	1.56
Read only	.25	0	.65	.30	.30	1.50
View and read	.09	.04	.30	.17	.39	1.00
Opponents						
No view/no read	.45	0	.09	0	0	0.54
View only	1.18	0	.09	0	0	1.27
Read only	.88	0	.25	.13	0	1.25
View and read	1.50	0	.17	0	0	1.67

Code
1 = Safety
2 = Nationalism
3 = Economics
4 = Conservation
5 = Energy independence